

My Cuban Crisis.1

5/19/12 9:06:43 AM

On Monday, Oct. 22, 1962, along with most people in America, I watched President Kennedy on television announcing that the Soviets were installing ballistic missiles in Cuba, preparing a capability to attack the US. He said we would blockade Cuba—he called it a “quarantine”—starting Wednesday morning. Any launch of a single missile from Cuba would lead to a full retaliatory strike against the Soviet Union.

That last bit sounded a little excessive. “Full?” I was caught by that, having written the guidance for that plan eighteen months earlier. Use it, essentially as a first-strike plan in the event someone—Cubans?—launched one missile against us? I wondered if the speechwriter had any idea what he was saying. Strong deterrence, for sure—“That should teach you, for putting missiles near Castro!”

I went to the phone and called Harry Rowen in the Pentagon. I asked him, “Could you use some help there?”

He said, “Why don’t you come on over here—tomorrow.” I made a reservation for early the next morning and packed a bag.

When I got to his office late Tuesday afternoon, Harry said to me, “Write a memo on what thirty-eight missiles could do to our strike-back ability.” (Thirty-eight was a number—I remember that clearly—I had in my mind that week. I’m not sure, looking at the records now, what estimate it came from. The Soviets planned sites for forty² missiles, with twenty reloads; the IRBMs, intermediate-range ballistic missiles, didn’t arrive because of the blockade.)

He gave me a map with the ranges of the missiles, medium-range and intermediate-range, shown as circles on it. Both Washington and Omaha were within range of the MRBMs, some of which were already operational. My first thought was that that meant the command posts in the Washington area and at Offutt Field in Omaha, SAC headquarters could be hit with very short warning time: minutes, essentially no warning. That was really the most significant effect. It meant the Soviets could be confident of decapitation. But I knew what most didn’t, even in the Pentagon: that wouldn’t spare them from a full, quick retaliation from our surviving forces, thanks to delegation.

(Did they know that? Did they assume it? To this day, even after glasnost, I’ve never seen any indication of that, one way or the other. Probably they didn’t, any more than we assumed it for them. Certainly I know of no hint that we ever told them, though for the purpose of deterring a strike relying on decapitation, we should have. We didn’t say it publicly, in fact we denied it, to keep from worrying our own public and our allies. But if we didn’t tell them privately—which was the case, so far as I know—perhaps it was to avoid encouraging them to do the same: which they did anyway, we now know.

So that was...not an insignificant effect. But we had never counted on protecting Washington or Offutt anyway. That was why the Gates study and the Partridge group had designed a set of alternate command posts, including at sea and airborne as well as the undergrounds, and why Eisenhower and Kennedy had delegated authority. As for the threat to SAC: Harry told me that bombers had already widely dispersed, some to civilian airfields. Thirty-eight missiles meant a big expansion, relatively, of their small strategic force. They were deploying their new ICBM, the SS-7, perhaps sixty sites were under construction. But only about ten, Harry told me, were operational. (Recent books give varying estimates, mostly higher, but I don't know how solid those figures are. [ASK PAVEL] Along with the four SS-6's at Plesetsk, for what they were worth, that meant that the Soviet first-strike missile force was more than tripling in size, overnight. It still didn't mean that they would escape total devastation if they struck. A single surviving SAC base would assure that, and well more than one would survive. Aside from our theater forces (against which they had large numbers of MRBMs, IRBMs and medium-range bombers), they would be hit by Polaris missiles and carrier forces, at sea, and surviving Atlas and Titan missiles (we had----). Fifty or so missiles didn't give them a disarming first-strike force.

Nor did the soft IRBMs on fixed sites do much for their ability to strike second. The mobile MRBMs, if we really couldn't find all of them, would do more for their retaliatory capability. (Khrushchev planned to replace all the MRBMs with IRBMs as they became available, which could cover more targets in a preemptive strike, but wouldn't survive our own preemption, close as they were to the US.) Of course, if the Soviets were allowed to base missiles on Cuba they could quickly deploy a larger number of these from their current arsenal. A hundred or so would make a big difference to their first-strike capability. Or so we calculated then, in days when it was assumed that either side could "accept" tens of millions of deaths, though not hundreds.

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I didn't know that McNamara had said, at the first ExComm meeting one week earlier, that these missiles "didn't constitute a military problem," they didn't affect our security. General Taylor had agreed, at that meeting. I would have said the same. The JCS didn't agree. But they were itching to attack Cuba. McNamara's point, and mine, was that they didn't affect us much more (despite the short warning time, which the JCS made much of) than forty more ICBMs in the Soviet Union, which we were expecting shortly. (A year earlier, CINCSAC had been claiming that the Soviets had a thousand ICBMs aimed at us. Forty, fifty, a hundred were not in that class.)

[Moving on quickly: some notes:

Harry read me into the picture quickly. A group of principals called the ExComm, for "Executive Committee of the National Security Council" had been meeting with the president, or without him, several times a day for the past week, deciding what to do. Three working groups of staffers were supporting them. One, centered in the Pentagon, was coordinating plans for an air attack and invasion, probably a week away as I arrived. Another under Walt Rostow at the State Department was looking at "long range plans": two weeks from now, and more. (That designation, "long range" sounds funny; actually, since crises of one sort or another were almost continual, back to back, in the government, that did describe a frequent time perspective.) Harry's boss Paul Nitze, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs (ISA), was in charge of the third, planning our response if the Soviet blockaded Berlin if and when we attacked Cuba.

Harry included me in his short-term planning group, and Walt Rostow asked me to participate in his working group as well. As far as I know, I was the only person to be in two of these three groups. I took no part in the Berlin planning (though I was familiar with the work Nitze and ISA had done on planning for Berlin the year before).

I was staying at the Dupont Plaza Hotel, where RAND people always stayed in those days. But we were working almost around the clock. Wednesday and Thursday nights I caught some sleep on a leather sofa in Nitze's office. (In 1964-65, when John McNaughton had replaced Nitze in that office, I was his Special Assistant, with a cubby-hole office the size of a closet just outside his. My first day on that job was our first bombing raid against North Vietnam, after the supposed attack on our destroyers in the Tonkin Gulf. I spent part of that night on that sofa again.)

11:52 AM

12:08 PM

[mention: background: in Cuba for LWR&DTF, see Lant.. plans, see Guantanamo. Believe JFK has given up on Cuba. See briefing on covert ops at CIA. Sympathy for Castro. (Visit to Harvard in 1959?) (Didn't know, under EGL, that he had been in charge of Mongoose; including assass proposal (I would have opposed). Martinez: 130 trips into Cuba; Sturgis, Barker. My karass. Hunt. Colson in Guatamala 1954. Cushman. 3/2 scheduled to reinforce Guantanamo.

K talk of defending Cuba, Sov equipment being sent. I assumed this was just a cover. We had no invasion plans. (Actually, Oct. 1-2 directive, for Oct. 20. Who at State knew? Johnson?) Few if any knew of these plans even at Harvard meetings 25 years later, 1987 (did Hershberg's paper come up?) They acted as if they didn't know of Mongoose, though that had come out in 1976.

What I had been doing: From January 1962 to May, my thesis. I had committed myself to finishing it by my reunion in May. I did it, working around the clock, with several secretaries. (Didn't publish it for 39 years: thought it had to be shortened; actually, not.) Ambiguity: paper in 1961, work from 1958-62. Describe: nature of

ambiguity; can't describe all uncertainties as definite or even approximate probabilities, as revealed by betting behavior. (approximate, verbally, within intervals: but don't behave as if probabilities.)

JFK: 1/3-1/2. (Later McGeorge B at Pleiku: from $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$

(Sherman Kent tries to relate probabilities to confidence in estimates: "likely, possible, very likely,... " But could have used intervals. (Uncertainty is not a product of a probability estimate and a probability of confidence: two separate judgments, as Knight put it.

I take part in Ph.D. march at Harvard, having defended my thesis and had it accepted.

I go to Yale to see Kathryn; see JFK give commencement speech.

Then (or earlier): I review new JSCP for Gilpatric; reflects my 1961 guidance. Comment on Walt Rostow's long BNSP. (Kaysen: This is a fascist document. If the Soviets want Afghanistan, I say, let them have it.) I write last draft of Ann arbor commencement speech for McNamara (based on Kaufmann's Athens speech). Each of these is an all-nighter.

Back to RAND: I feel I owe them consulting work, on whatever. July-August-September: I don't recall. Then October 22...]

[Cuba outline: with Rostow on oil blockade; write memo (Friday?) In Rostow working group: "This shows how realistic the Berlin game was." Turkey cable that night. End of crisis. Harry gives Nitze estimate: 1/10. I thought 1/100; Harry 1/1000.

12:37 PM 1713 words (two hours, writing; 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ since starting. Break for shower, shave.)

1:19 PM

Sitting around a long table at the State Department, over a dozen people on both sides of the table, reading the daily reports from CIA, on progress of the construction of the missiles in Cuba and air defenses; reports from the Pentagon on events on the blockade line; requests for information from the ExComm; cables from embassies around the world on reactions to the crisis.

I read two cables that were almost identical to two game messages in the Berlin simulation game a year earlier. Students were protesting our actions in Berlin, and large crowds were rioting around the American Embassy in Delhi. As Walt Rostow was passing behind my chair, I turned to him and handed him the cables. He read them quickly. I said, "This shows how realistic the Berlin game was." He handed them back and said, "Or how unrealistic this is."

We rarely saw, in the working groups, any member of the ExComm, who were meeting almost continuously at the White House or State Department. Once, on

Saturday morning, Douglas Dillon, Secretary of the Treasury, dropped into the Rostow group during a break in the ExComm meetings. He didn't know me, but at one point, looking in my direction, he asked, "What is it we're offering? We've got to have something to offer him, to get out." I burst out, "We're offering not to hit his goddamn missiles!" He looked at me incredulously, snorted, and turned away.

It was incredibly impudent of me—though no rank was being observed in the working groups, or, as it turned out, in the ExComm—and provocative, not really my style. I'm not proud of that memory. And it didn't really reflect my expectations about how the crisis would come out, or ought to. I was thinking all week—at least from Wednesday on, when the Soviets didn't choose to challenge the blockade—that Khrushchev *had* to back down, without any real concession on our part. He was looking down the barrel of US invasion forces that were fully primed go on Monday or Tuesday, if not earlier. We had him outgunned at every level in the Caribbean: in the air, at sea, on the ground.

That wasn't true in Europe, in Berlin or Turkey, or NATO as a whole. But our strategic superiority was so enormous, I couldn't believe he would really challenge it there, either. I suspected that Dillon hadn't really absorbed, if he knew it at all, how much of a mirage the notion of Soviet superiority that we had all feared in the Fifties had turned out to be. (That turned out to have been true; Nitze had given a lesson to Dillon on this during the crisis). It was precisely to repair that extreme imbalance, I presumed, that Khrushchev had undertaken what seemed to be this desperate measure. He had over-reached. It might indeed have been a preparation to bargain over Berlin on more equal terms, or even to make new threats, and that was worth batting back, though I wouldn't have thought that was essential. Even if we had accepted it, it wouldn't have changed significantly the risks for him of confronting us over Berlin.

That was pretty much what Nitze thought, and Harry; and for that matter, the JCS. The difference was that they *wanted* to attack, and I certainly didn't, and didn't think it was needed to get the missiles out.

[In short, while I didn't think it was essential for us to prevent a deployment of missiles on this scale to Cuba, I did think it was worthwhile –and not too risky—for Kennedy to respond as he did, especially after he had given explicit warnings against it. His domestic reasons for responding were clear enough, but I didn't see them as essential to deciding as he did, or even critical in his mind. The external politics of the situation were enough. If he had backed down from his own warnings, in the face of this provocative move, I shared the view that our allies in Europe would have been impressed both by Khrushchev's boldness and Kennedy's timidity. They would fear that Khrushchev was not likely in the future to believe Kennedy's warnings, and that he was not wrong about this. Our allies would be less willing to commit themselves to threats that Kennedy was likely to back down from and that Khrushchev was not.

2:33 PM

So it was important for Kennedy to show boldness—the blockade was an act of war—both for domestic and for external reasons. (I don't remember whether I recognized then just how crucial domestic politics was in the calculations of presidents as they addressed foreign policy. But the alliance considerations were real; and I took the defense of Berlin very seriously.) I wasn't in favor of invading Cuba, or attacking the missiles. But if we did either, I didn't believe Khrushchev could afford to expand the conflict.

On Thursday, Rostow took me with him from the State Department back to the Pentagon, where he was to meet with a CIA specialist on Cuba. He was interested in expanding the blockade to cover "POL"—oil and other petroleum products. How long would Cuban supplies of oil last, he wanted to know, before their economy ground to a halt? Six weeks, he was told. He was excited by that, more, it seemed to me, than was justified. He said it would mean "a ticking clock" for Cuba. Back at the working group, I wrote a critical memo to him. An alarm, I said, that rang after six weeks didn't seem related to the time-scale we were facing. All the missiles were expected to be operational within days, and the other working group I was on contemplated an invasion by Tuesday.

(Something I learned later was that Rostow, in wartime, had a recurrent focus on stopping the flow of oil to an adversary. In World War II, he had been one of a number of economists (Carl Kaysen was another) recommending targets for our strategic bombing, with the objective of wrecking German war production. He had long felt that "the great missed opportunity of the war" had been the failure to concentrate bombing on German oil refining and storage. (Albert Speer, who had been in charge of German war production, tended to agree). Later during Vietnam, he had pressed in 1966—a year into the Rolling Thunder bombing campaign against North Vietnam, which had failed to show much effect on the battlefield—for a major attack on oil targets near Hanoi, which he predicted would be decisive in ending the North Vietnamese effort. (The attacks had little effect; the North Vietnamese had dispersed their supplies by that time). He had something of an obsession with cutting off what General Jack D. Ripper of "Dr. Strangelove" would have described as an enemy's vital fluids.)

Moreover, I said in the memo, what we had heard of the ExCom meetings that morning, which led to a message to Khrushchev from JFK, indicated that while we were demanding that work on the missiles be stopped and the missiles subsequently removed, no deadline was being set. We needed, I argued, to put a time limit on the process explicitly if we wanted the Soviets to move out: something a lot shorter than six weeks, more like days.

[The above is rough; it's not even clear to me that a narrative of my own involvement is worthwhile at this point; maybe something very condensed, as to how it looked at the time, moving quickly to my study in 1964 and what I found out then and later.] 3002 words 3:32 PM

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Also, memo to Rostow is embarrassing; it shows how hawkish I was, wanting a one week ultimatum that day (Friday) or the next. Actually, RFK did communicate an ultimatum the next night, Saturday, and his was only 48 hours, in line with our planning in the other group. But his was a bluff! (Almost surely, from his brother's point of view. And his brother was right, even based on what we knew, which was simply that all the missiles were operational, so there was a chance that one or two would be fired.

In fact, JFK had decided against the air strike (probably even earlier but no later than) when he was told on Sunday Oct. 21 that the USAF would get only 90% of the missiles, and when he had learned on the day before that only some of the missiles were now operational. (Thus, if some missiles survived, there was only a chance that they would be the operational ones).

That was appropriate thinking. The stakes involved didn't come close to making it worthwhile to lose one American city. (What would? NOT a conventional assault on Europe—since our first strike would doom Europe to annihilation, from Soviet medium-range forces, air and missile. Yet that was the fundamental premise of our “defense” of Europe, our NATO “guarantee”: a guarantee that we would ensure that they were dead rather than red!

(It was not a suicide pact, for us, until the mid-Sixties., in terms of what we knew: and didn't know, about nuclear winter. Still, given the Soviet nuclear forces in range of Europe, we could much more cheaply achieve the same effect—of denying the resources of Europe to the Soviets and preventing their having to live under Communism—by mining the cities of Western Europe with nuclear weapons, to which we controlled the trigger. (When Herman Kahn asked, what was it worth to us—in terms of casualties in the US (given his civil defense program, or without it)—to prevent the Soviets from controlling the economies of West Europe by a US first strike: astonishingly, he didn't figure in the destruction of Europe by the Soviets that would follow, and which we could not prevent!)

But considering nuclear winter, and the real likelihood that our air attack would have been followed by invasion, which would trigger Soviet tac nucs in Cuba and very possibly (McNamara: “a high risk”) our first strike against the Soviet Union, carrying out RFK's (or my) ultimatum would have ended life on earth.

Did I want that ultimatum to be carried out? No. But I don't recall spending any time thinking about what to do if it were challenged. Implicitly, I thought that the combined chance of having to carry out an air attack, invading, and the conflict expanding to nuclear war was low: 1 in a 100. (Did I really think it was worth even that? Perhaps: in terms of avoiding a Berlin crisis. That was wrong.

At thirty-one, I was over-confident that the leader who was out-gunned would back down under threat. The danger that K backed away from was not JFK's threat, per

se, but his own lack of control of Castro and his own troops: the danger that they would do something that would provoke even Kennedy into carrying out his threat. (That didn't mean he thought JFK was a coward or generally a bluffer; simply that he saw him as reasonable, but up to a point: capable of being provoked into dangerous response.)

(The troops at Kent State should never have been issued live ammunition. Their use of it—whether uncontrolled, or triggered by this own, low-level commander (or just conceivably, by a higher authority!)—forced Nixon to leave Cambodia much sooner than he had planned, and could have cost him his war.)

I certainly didn't imagine that Khrushchev had taken the risks he had: of putting tactical nuclear weapons and warheads (sending more warheads into Cuba just ahead of the blockade, after it had been announced: a time when he "should" have been taking them out if he wasn't going to tell us they were there! (And even if he had told us, he gained nothing by sending still more, after the missiles were discovered!)

6:50 PM

9:20 AM

20 May 2012

WARHEADS

Two questions kept recurring in the discussions of the ExComm and our working groups: When would the missiles be operational? And, had the warheads arrived? (The same questions, it turns out, were very much on Khrushchev's mind during those days).

"Operational" meant, capable of being fired. For the Soviets, an SS-4 medium-range missile being operational meant that it could be fired within two and a half hours. The first hour was for moving the warhead to the missile and mating it. The rest, apparently, was for fueling it and providing aiming instructions. We knew this because—one of our highest secrets at the time—a Soviet mole, Colonel Oleg Penkovsky, was supplying us with operating manuals and specifications for Soviet missiles. As a result we knew the sequence of steps needed to install a missile, make it operational and fire it, and the time it was supposed to take for each step. From the U-2 and low-level photos, our analysts could follow the progress of the installation, probably more closely than the high command in Moscow.

Two and a half hours would be a long time under attack. Our solid-fueled Minuteman ICBMs, by contrast, could fire within minutes of receiving an order. On the other hand, the Minuteman missiles—the first of which were hastily made operational at the outset of the crisis—became vulnerable over the years, despite their hardened silos, to the increasing accuracy of Soviet ICBMs. The SS-4's were

not hardened at all, but they were mobile. They could be hidden, and moved about, so an attacker could not be sure of finding them all.

The question for the president and the ExComm was, if we attacked the missiles, might one or more be fired—with or without authorization from their highest authorities—against an American city? Though he never said it explicitly, it's clear that Kennedy did not regard the stakes in the confrontation as worth the loss of one city. (That's less clear for the JCS: in fact, it would seem, untrue. And it was not at all made clear to the American public).

The CIA estimated (correctly) that the first regiment of SS-4's had become operational on Saturday, October 20: the same day that the president and the ExComm were conducting their last debate on the blockade versus air strike. The president gave the air force one last crack on pushing for the air strike on Sunday, October 21. When General Sweeney, commander of Tactical Air, said he could not assure destroying more than 90% of the missiles in the first attack, the president closed the discussion, in favor of blockade as "a first step."

[I'll carry this on roughly.]

11:03 AM

When the missiles were first photographed on Oct. 14, none were (was? Harvard old usage) operational, or close to it. (The SA-2's were first photographed on Sept. 1 (?), which led to the first warning by JFK on Sept. 3. It seems to have taken a long time for them to become operational. (CHECK when this was. First and only firing was on Oct. 27; but presumably some were operational well before that). The Cubans assumed they were there to prevent U-2 flights from finding the missiles; yet none was fired on October 14. Were any operational before then? Polmar presumes that K was confident that the missiles had not been discovered then, or after: but why? JFK's failure to reveal them to Gromyko? Or did that assure K that JFK didn't mean to disclose them to the American public before the election?)

On Oct. 16, at the first ExComm meeting, the JCS favored attacking them immediately, in one or two days. None were operational in that period (before October 20). Clearly, each day that passed increased the likelihood that some would be ready to fire, more and more of them each day. Thus, each day's discussion of the options closed the window a little more on the ability to destroy the missiles without risking the loss of an American city.

On October 22, when Khrushchev was awaiting the announced JFK speech and assumed that it had to do with Cuba, he said to his son Sergei: "Most of the missiles aren't operational as yet. They are defenseless and everything could be destroyed from the air at one blow." [Polmar, p. 180. Sergei Khrushchev, "Nikita Khrushchev," 554] He was relieved when he heard the speech (read to the Presidium at 2AM in Moscow) that it announced a blockade rather than an attack.

Throughout the days between Oct. 16 and Oct. 22, and then toward the end of the next week, what was driving debate between the blockade and the air strike was “When would the missiles be operational?” The blockade—which clearly didn’t protect the US from the missiles already there—was sold on the argument that it preserved flexibility, that it was a first step, from which escalation was possible “if it didn’t work.” But what did “work” mean? Obviously, it was very unlikely by itself to induce Khrushchev to remove the missiles, as Acheson argued. (When he was overruled on this, he left the discussions). But if the blockade were to be given several days (from October 24) to have any effect at all, and to be enforced on a few ships, the window would be shut on hitting the missiles before they were all operational.

Moreover, it’s not clear why so much emphasis was put—either in Washington or in Moscow—on the date when “all” the missiles would be operational. From the moment (October 20—and from the point of view of Washington, it could have been earlier: the intelligence estimates couldn’t be relied on totally) when even a few became ready to fire, the risk existed, greater than zero, that an attack would lead to the loss of tens to hundreds of thousands of American civilians.

If JFK was to give the order to attack—as he contemplated in the first ExComm discussion in the late morning of Tuesday, October 16—without having to worry about retaliation from Cuba against America, it had to be on that day (as the JCS were ready to do) or Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday. To be sure, the risk was still fairly small on Friday and Saturday (when some civilians on the ExComm, as well as the JCS, were still inclined to attack), assuming that it concentrated especially on the sites that were most suspected of being operational. (That was not 100% reliable, since they realized that there could be sites they had not yet discovered, and which could become capable of firing some time after the first attacks). Small, but not zero. Sweeney’s creditable candor about that on Sunday, October 21, decided the issue finally for Kennedy (though almost surely his mind was made up well before that.)

11:38 AM

11:50 AM

But if the air attack was too dangerous for Kennedy on October 21, why would it be acceptable a week or more later? Didn’t the choice of blockade on that day rule out an air attack later: after the blockade had been tried and “failed”? It wasn’t as if the blockade had a real chance of getting the missiles out, without risking retaliation, after which one could turn to the higher-risk option. It seems plausible that the choice of a blockade (which, on the evidence, I believe Kennedy made no later than Thursday morning—when he told RFK and McNamara to swing the consensus in the ExComm to a blockade—and probably by Wednesday morning, when he sent RFK and Bartlett to tell Bolshakov that a trade with the Turkish missiles was possible) was a choice against an air attack, ever.

(Except, as we’ll see, that he could have been forced into it by Castro’s attacks on US reconnaissance planes; or a confrontation at the blockade line on Wednesday or

later, which looked unlikely after Wednesday morning: except that a Russian sub might have sunk an American carrier on Saturday! Both of these representing actions unauthorized by Khrushchev and beyond his control, unknown to the Americans).

This was not the way the JCS saw it. Nor, it seems, Khrushchev. He was convinced by Friday—by information from Castro and other sources—that invasion was near, which led to his long cable arriving Friday night and his instructions to Feklisov to make the same offer sooner: to remove the missiles simply on a pledge of no-invasion. That was despite the fact that all the missiles were operational by the next day, Saturday, Oct. 27. Likewise despite that fact, the JCS were urging attack and invasion on Friday, Saturday—and (LeMay) Sunday, even after the announcement that the missiles were being removed (which the JCS, especially LeMay, preferred to disbelieve).

In other words, they were proposing, urgently, to attack operational missiles, without being able to guarantee that some would be fired, either under attack or soon after. (Were they more confident than they told the president that the attackers would get them all? If so, should they have been; wasn't that wishful? If not—what the hell were they thinking?)

For thirteen days they had been pressing the case, plausibly, that the missiles must be attacked before they were operational. Now, by the end of the week, they were still arguing for an attack although the missiles *were* operational. Were they really in the mood they were in the year before, when they are “assured” the president that if worse came to worst in the Berlin crisis and the US had to strike first, we would suffer “at most ten million deaths”?

Quite possibly they were. As Khrushchev said later about his military men who felt he must stand fast in Cuba even if it meant all-out nuclear war, lest they be condemned by the Chinese and the Albanians: “Maniacs.”

12:22 PM

Or as Kennedy said to Sorensen after an earlier exchange with LeMay: “That’s the trouble...”

Let’s look again at the very “option” of a surprise attack on the missiles in Cuba.

12:54 PM

This was 1962. There had been no unwarned attack across a border since North Korea invaded South Korea in 1950. The world had no hesitancy in recognizing that as aggression: a violation of the UN Charter of 1945. The UN Security Council (with the Soviet Union having absented itself, over the issue of seating Communist China in place of the Chiang Kai Shek representatives now based in Taiwan) authorized a military response to repel the invaders. (Truman had already taken military steps

without consulting Congress and proceeded to go to war—or as he called it, “a police action”—without a Congressional declaration: a fateful precedent correctly denounced by “Mr. Republican,” Senator Robert Taft, as unconstitutional.)

The UN Charter-- ratified by Congress and thus ranking as “highest law of the land”—forbade any military action not authorized by the Security Council, except in immediate self-defense until such time as the Council could act. The UN (mainly US) military response to North Korean aggression fit that requirement. A US unilateral attack on Cuba would not. Under the Charter, it would qualify as aggression as clearly as the attack on South Korea (though the US could veto any joint action against it). The earlier precedents were, as RFK pointed out in the discussions, the Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbor (along with Hitler’s attacks in Europe, not mentioned, which had inspired the formation of the UN).

As Khrushchev’s former aide Shahnazarov asked, almost plaintively, asked in a retrospective conference on the crisis 25 years later, “Did no one [in the ExComm discussions] mention the legality of our action?” The answer is pretty close to no (although there were passing observations that it paralleled our own deployment to Turkey). The point bore on the legality or illegality of our proposed violent response.

Again, it was 1962. There had not been, for example, the Israeli air attack on the Iraqi nuclear reactor at Osirak (1982?) or later on the suspected Syrian site (2007?). As I write this, in 2012, there has been discussion for some six years of a possible Israeli and/or US air attack on Iranian nuclear energy sites. The US invasion of Iraq was rationalized to a large extent on the possibility, or assertion, that Iraq was pursuing a nuclear weapons capability. In other words, preventing proliferation (to unfriendly states) has been put forward for the last decade as an excuse—a legitimate motive- for preventive war (formally outlawed by the UN Charter, unless authorized by the Security Council): even, in the case of Iran with its deep underground nuclear energy sites, for nuclear attack. As President Bush said in 2008 when asked if the US might conduct a nuclear attack against Iran’s sites, “I said, *all* options are on the table.” His precise words have been echoed by every major presidential candidate at the time and since, and by President Obama.

Although the US, along with others, formally condemned the Osirak attack as illegal, in the last decade the question of the legality of such options virtually never comes up for discussion in America. So it is hard today to appreciate just how noteworthy it was that *the same was true in the ExComm discussions fifty years ago*.

(I happen to be equally struck at the absence of such consideration at the conferences on the crisis by academics and former officials twenty-five and thirty years later—still prior to the “new dispensation”—as evidenced by the lone query by Shahnazarov.)

1:51 PM get up (belatedly, stiff neck)

1:57 PM

At that time, the UN Charter definition of aggression was still sacrosanct. What did get attention was the legality of the blockade. That, too, was traditionally regarded as an act of war (which should have called for Congressional declaration, not merely consultation, which it didn't get either). And by the international rules governing blockades (even during war)—since it obviously affected neutral nations as well—it was illegal to declare it 500 miles out from Cuba. (See Polmar). (It was originally proposed for 800 miles out, to put it beyond the reach of the Il-28's newly based in Cuba. That consideration presumably wasn't reflected in the pre-WWI rules. But if we were at war, couldn't the Il-28's "legally" attack our blockading ships? (That would have been suicidal for them, indeed; that was why they were regarded as "obsolete," though they could, at great risk, reach well into the continental US from Florida. Khrushchev had thoughtfully provided nuclear bombs for the Il-28's—to attack invading ships—so there would have been great consequence if one had evaded destruction).

Khrushchev did call our blockade "aggression," with reason, as well as "piracy." Most Americans, including me, heard this as rhetoric and bluster at the time, although the terms were technically correct in law.

It was just the summer before when we were being urged by the president to build fallout shelters because of our need to resist a potential illegal blockade of West Berlin. Our right to maintain that Western outpost hundreds of miles within East Germany was based entirely on legal grounds, the legality of occupation of Berlin by US, British and French military forces (along with Soviets) as a result of agreements at the end of WWII. (It was not "might makes right," in that region, except to the extent that the US was willing to initiate the total annihilation of Europe, East and West, along with the Soviet Union (and China, as our plans then called for).¹

The crux of the Berlin "crisis" from 1958 to 1962 was Khrushchev's proposal to sign a peace treaty with East Germany, which he claimed—and we denied—would end

¹ (Our superiority, such as it was, amounted only to the expectation that we would probably suffer at most the loss of a few American cities in the process—unless the Soviets struck us preemptively—from stray, surviving Soviet ICBMs or sub-launched missiles. We didn't know then that smoke from the cities we set on fire, rising into the stratosphere and blocking sunlight for a decade, would starve us to death, too, within months to years.)

the legality of our occupation the presumptive illegality of a ground and air blockade of West Berlin by East German forces, backed up by their Warsaw Pact allies. It was to defend our legal rights to free ground and air access to Berlin, against an illegal blockade, that President Kennedy in July, 1961 called his fellow citizens to prepare for a nuclear war (in which no fallout shelters could protect our allies in Europe from total extermination).

That's why it seemed prudent to avoid the word "blockade" for our blockade a year later, preferring "quarantine." (see tapes, ref in Polmar)

2:29 PM

8:13

I, for one, had been enthusiastic that Harry Truman was following a policy of resisting aggression, with collective action, when he sent troops into South Korea. (I wasn't concerned, at nineteen, at the lack of congressional involvement in the decision). I thought it was a good policy and a good decision, and it meant to me that I should be prepared to go.

After educational deferments to finish college and a year's graduate fellowship, I enlisted in the Marine Corps Officers' Candidates' Course and eventually became a rifle company commander in the Second Marine Division, Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. I went to the Mediterranean with my battalion, Third Battalion, Second Marines (3/2) in the summer of 1954, expecting war in the Middle East. (I volunteered to extend my duty by a year to accompany the men I'd trained-- as a company officer and as battalion training officer—into combat if that should occur).

Again, I was proud when my commander in chief, President Eisenhower (for whom I'd not voted) chose to oppose what amounted to aggression by our closest allies, the British and French, that fall. That was why I had joined the Marines, to fight aggression. It wasn't pure anti-communism, though by that time I was a committed Cold Warrior.

That was just five years earlier. It occurs to me as I write this that my status in the inactive reserves must have expired just before the crisis. To stay in longer I would have had to start going to active duty drills, which I didn't want to do. I'd chosen to stay in that long because I *wanted* to be called up if something like Korea arose again.

If we'd gotten into a ground war in Cuba, it would have gone on (I now know, from my tour in Vietnam) for a long time, and a lot of reservists would have been called up, including me if I'd stayed in. I hadn't anticipated that it might have been for an American act of aggression.

That's what it would have been: in law and in reality. We had no more right to occupy Cuba and to kill Cubans than we had three years later in Vietnam (or the

French, Japanese or Chinese had had before us). And no more prospect of success—certainly, of quick and easy success—than they had had, or we did, in Vietnam, despite the relative advantages of attacking an island close to our shores. The Cubans were as nationalistic, courageous and patriotic, as resentful of foreign domination, and as prepared and organized for guerrilla warfare as the Vietnamese when they began their campaign against the French and Americans, and like the Vietnamese they would have learned and improved as they went along faster than we would. It would not have been a good war, or a just war, for us.

Three years after the crisis, I volunteered to leave my job as a desk official in the Pentagon to serve in Vietnam (after exploring my prospects for duty in the Marine Corps if I applied for active service: and being told I might well be assigned to write speeches for the Commandant in Virginia, having written speeches for the Secretary of Defense). Again I was under the impression (false, this time) that we were opposing aggression, “covert aggression from North Vietnam” in Walt Rostow’s terms. That’s what the country was told (sometimes in speeches I drafted; but I believed that part), and I wasn’t the only one who believed it.

The point is not to glorify my (sometimes deluded) idealism, but to say that “aggression” was a meaningful term to my generation and the one before me, and it was understood to be something that the U.S. didn’t do, something that we would shed our blood to oppose. That’s why I find it so notable to recall how little consideration there was either in the Pentagon, the White House (when the tapes of the ExComm meetings became available), the Congress, the press or the public to the possibility that Khrushchev’s use of the term “aggression” might possibly be accurate for what we were proposing to do.

But then, Khrushchev and Castro— and the JCS and CIA and some but not all members of the ExComm—knew something that none of the rest of us did. They knew that the U.S. government under President Kennedy had been actively attacking Cuba, covertly (in ways designed for “plausible denial”) for over a year, and that there was strong reason for them to believe that the president intended to invade Cuba to occupy it and replace the Castro regime. They were certain—and it was true—that he was making every preparation to do so, and was taking no trouble to keep them from knowing it.

Massive amphibious landing exercises (the largest ever held, much larger than any I had participated in a few years earlier) were conducted throughout the year to rehearse invasion of an island. The most recent of these, just before the crisis, was run on the beaches of Vieques, Puerto Rico (where I had spent three months on maneuvers), to overthrow the game-regime of “Ortsac” (Castro spelled backwards).

When McNamara acknowledged a quarter of a century later that if he had been a Russian or Cuban in the summer of 1962 he would have anticipated an American invasion, he wasn’t attributing either paranoia or an exceptional intelligence apparatus to his then-adversaries.

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Now, I don't think I thought about aggression or illegality more than the others, despite my concern above. Not seeing, anymore than anyone else inside or out of the government, K's move as a response—to our own moves toward invading the island—it looked impudent, provocative, at best. With the secrecy and deception, it had a sinister feel. It wasn't hard for the president to convey the impression to the public that this was meant for a possible, near-term surprise attack; or at least, for "blackmail" threats of one.

I knew, on the other hand, the real balance. I knew from RAND that most people who followed the situation at all had never really absorbed the change in the picture that followed the Berlin scare of the year before, the change in the estimates. So I couldn't take seriously, any more than McNamara did, that a few dozen rockets on Cuba gave the Soviets a first-strike capability comparable to ours.

These were vulnerable, first-strike weapons; it gave them something to strike first with, compared to almost nothing. It gave them a very small second-strike capability against the US, instead of virtually nothing. (It didn't change significantly their first- or second-strike capability against Europe, though these weapons were subtracted from their large missile forces aimed at Europe.)

Their previous real nuclear threat to the US was essentially zero (like Saddam's, in 2003). K's claims of "having no need to put missiles outside our borders, to defend Cuba" was a total bluff. He could "defend Cuba" from the Soviet Union only by a suicide attack with the handful of ICBMs he had then (aside from his nuclear missile subs, not yet operational after some disastrous accidents, or his bombers, which would never make it through our defenses): a suicidal attack (leading surely to the annihilation of the Soviet Union) initiated by officials *not under attack in their homeland or at the sites*.

Missiles in Cuba, on the other hand, (in much larger numbers than ICBMs in the SU at that time) could be triggered by men who were at the moment under attack or about to be, and were surrounded by men fighting in defense of their homeland. Still a suicide attack, but an incomparably more plausible one—not only for an illusory "defense" but for revenge. For deterrence of an attack on Cuba, these made a very big difference, all the difference.

Not only were they more likely to be fired, from Cuba, than were weapons from the Soviet Union without these deployed, but their presence made more likely a Soviet retaliatory move somewhere, in Europe if not in the Caribbean. Soviet troops were at risk, and a considerable part of the Soviet nuclear inventory. The effect was the same as the IRBMs in Turkey, from the point of view of the Turks. (As it turned out in the crisis, the Turks were as reluctant to see those "obsolete" weapons go as the

Cubans were. Their presence meant to the Turks that the US war machine was tied to Turkey; an attack on Turkey had to attack Americans; and had to risk that Americans would fire their weapons in Turkey against Russia. (We also had fighter-bombers in Turkey, but their range was more limited)

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So I saw this as a psychological contest with Khrushchev. (Did it occur to me that he might be reacting to my Gilpatric speech? (That was the conclusion of Horelick and Rush at RAND, who wrote a paper after the crisis having to counteract the Top Secret report they had written earlier in which they estimated that K's speeches about "missiles being produced like sausages" must mean a real crash program of ICBMs in the SU, since "K didn't bluff." (!) Now that it turned out he did bluff (and had been doing so for half a dozen years) they attributed his deployment in Cuba as a direct response to the humiliation of the Gilpatric speech (Thanks a lot, Myron and Arnold!) But there was also the interview by JFK about a possible US first-strike (to Stewart Alsop: GET)

So it made sense that K would want to repair the balance somewhat—from having nothing (against the US) to having something—which he could do easily (if he could get away with !) by moving some of his copious (excessive) missiles facing Europe to Cuba. But why would he think he could get away with it?

Well, for one thing, it was a perfectly legal thing for him to do. AND it was no more than—it was essentially the same as—we had done in Turkey. We'd put missiles in Italy and Britain, too, but they didn't share a land border with Russia. Cuba was a little further, 90 miles away, but it was in "our lake." (Russia, or the Soviet Union, had never, so far as I knew, regarded Turkey as "ours").

I may even have been aware that Eisenhower had had definite misgivings about putting the missiles in Turkey (a gesture made to compensate for Sputnik: after Greece and France had refused to base them). In fact, he had delayed actually deploying them, on various excuses. AJW (Wohlstetter) had made them the poster children for "bad ideas" in his "Delicate Balance of Terror" in 1959: as vulnerable, first-strike weapons adding nothing to second-strike capability. (I'll have to look up whether he saw them as provocative, by their contiguity. But he did see such weapons as "inviting attack" in a crisis.) I made the same point in my "Crude Analysis of Strategic Choice," which presented an abstract model of the RAND/AJW thinking.

Ike had even said (I doubt if I knew this in 1962) that "it would be as if the Soviets put missiles in Mexico or Canada. Now, that would raise the gravest issues for us." (Why, one might ask. But let that pass for now).

JFK used the same thought, in reverse, during the crisis. Their putting missiles in Cuba was like "What if we put missiles in Turkey?" McGeorge Bundy had to remind him, "Well, we did." (Actually, "we" here referred specifically to Kennedy). "But that was five years ago," JFK replies. Actually, while the decision had been announced five years earlier—what he was referring to—the deployment had not been until 1961, under Kennedy. He had repeatedly discussed the desirability of getting them out, most recently only a months earlier, with Rusk.

This lapse seems to be one of the short-term memory problems associated with "drinking from the fire hose" which I experienced myself in the Pentagon in 1964 and which I saw two years later with RFK, who asked me, "When was Vienna?" as he tried to recall "something that was going on around the same time" as the Cuban Crisis. (The Vienna summit was a year and a half earlier). (I've never figured out what he might have been referring to, also obtruding in October, 1962. Mongoose?)

But this one was potentially serious. Neither the president nor anyone around him seemed aware of the possibility (the actuality) that K's move might be a response to something that had happened that same year, under Kennedy. (The IRBMs in Turkey became operational in April, as Malinovsky pointed out to Khrushchev in May, across the Black Sea from them.) (CHECK TIMING ON THIS) (This is quite apart from his responding to our covert actions against Cuba and preparations for invasion, which were not in our awareness either, though the president did know these.

The point here is that the president did *not* seem aware that Khrushchev experienced the missiles in Turkey as something that Kennedy had just done, and done to him. Kennedy thought of them as something Eisenhower had done, and that he intended to undo! (His adversary was more aware of the reality of what he was doing than he was! As if Khrushchev knew of Mongoose and the invasion exercises and Kennedy did not (any more than the rest of us did)!

(Indeed, some Americans think Kennedy and RFK were unaware of the assassination plans, or at least some of them, against Castro; I doubt this. Khrushchev and Castro, in any case, were aware of them: and the American public, along with much of the ExComm, was not. When they were revealed in 1975, many former Kennedy officials couldn't believe he had known about or directed them. (They had the same reaction when it came out that he had taped Oval Office and Cabinet Room meetings, like Nixon).

11:07 AM

What if I had known all this, our actions against Cuba, that week in Washington? I know what my reaction was when I did learn about it, thirteen years later, with the Church Committee findings: shock. Both about the assassination efforts and the scale of the covert actions. (I didn't learn of the invasion planning for another decade, with Jim Hershberg's article). That was after Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers and my disillusion with the Cold War, so my views had changed generally.

But in this case, my earlier views were not that different. I think I would have been just as shocked, and repelled.

As a Cold Warrior, I saw the Soviet Union and its imposed communist system as real adversaries, to the US and other countries and to my values and ideals. I didn't see third world revolution in those terms. I had no interest in participating in a program of counterrevolution. From what little I knew of Castro—who had spoken to great applause at Harvard when I was in the Society of Fellows at Harvard (I heard him on the campus radio)—his was a righteous cause against Batista.

His turn to Soviet support seemed obviously an inevitable response to our economic pressures—cutting the sugar quota and imposing an arms embargo—after his nationalizations. I was shocked and dismayed by the Bay of Pigs. I was staying with Harry Rowen at his hotel when it happened, and we read about it together at the breakfast counter at the Sheraton. Harry said, "So that's what's been going on at all those meetings that I wasn't invited to."

His reaction seemed the same as mine: an appalling action, doomed to fail and deserving to fail. But as the background came out, I put it down to an Eisenhower program that Kennedy had inherited and couldn't turn off. (I didn't put much weight on the fact the Kennedy himself had called for just such an action when he was campaigning. I'd thought of that as campaign talk: the way that Obama supporters in 2008 brushed off his talk of Afghanistan as the "good war," one that he meant to reinforce.)

At any rate, I got the impression that Kennedy, who manfully took full responsibility for the fiasco, had learned his lesson and was prepared to live and let live with Castro. Didn't he say that? Or did I just infer it? Anyway, I lived with that impression through the Missile Crisis the next year, and beyond.

Khrushchev's claims that the purpose of the arms shipments to Cuba were "defensive" I heard as sheer rhetoric, covering who-knew-what real motives. When he made the same assertions about the missiles, when he finally acknowledged them, it sounded absurd to me—an unusually thin rationalization—not even to be weighed in the discussions of why he had chosen just this moment and just this way to even the strategic balance (presumably to do with Berlin).

My impression was and still is that most of those in the working groups and many in the ExComm felt the same way: which made the latter discussions of Khrushchev's motives perfectly irrelevant at best, or seriously misleading, to those in the know, including the president.

Those who were "witting," in the CIA phrase, of the covert operations evidently didn't choose, or were directed not to inform the others about the past year's worth of covert operations against Cuba or the invasion planning. That can be inferred from the published tapes of the meetings. The index to the publication contains not

one reference to "Mongoose." (However, this is partly a shortcoming of the index. There are a few references to Mongoose: May & Zelikow, 442-444, 478. This is on Friday morning, Oct. 26; any earlier?)

It could be that such references have remained classified (despite the revelations in 1975 and after) and were redacted, but the context in the discussions doesn't suggest that. Of the list of participants, some certainly did know, from their roles in the control of covert operations: the president, McGeorge Bundy, McNamara, Gilpatric, Taylor, RFK. Perhaps, but not certainly, Alexis Johnson, Ball (?), ... Almost certainly not: Sorensen; Lyndon Johnson; in particular, Douglas Dillon, the Republican Secretary of the Treasury; Edwin Martin, in charge of Latin America at State; Paul Nitze; ...

The presence of these last meant that certain crucial subjects could not be discussed while they were in the room; which meant that certain discussions that went on and on, about the Soviet motives and what that suggested about Khrushchev's probable further actions and reactions, were beside the point, useless, a waste of the president's time (probably a major reason why he absented himself from some of them, not because he wanted "freer discussion," since the internal secrecy process precluded that!)

(Why was the president encouraging this variegated group, some witting and other not, to be meeting regularly at all and holding its many hours of discussion? My strong guess is: he wanted a consensus-building project, to bring about a "unanimous" support for his chosen policy (from early on, the blockade) or at least to win the silence of all of them—with an enhanced sense of bonding and solidarity from the intense, shared experience-- about their own and others' misgivings about the president's policy and the arguments for alternatives.

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On the last, crucial point, the device succeeded. After the crisis, there were repeated assertions by administration spokesmen that the president's firmness, which had finally won the day, had not been suspended for a moment by his giving any consideration whatever to the demand in Khrushchev's last letter of October 27 for trading the missiles in Cuba off against the missiles in Turkey. As the tapes finally revealed decades later, every member of the ExComm knew that was flatly not true. But not one had contradicted that description, either at the time or for many years afterward, before the tapes were published.

Probably none of them, except RFK, knew that the president himself had suggested that resolution to the Soviets, through RFK, directly and indirectly to Bolshakov and Dobrynin, starting as early as Tuesday the 23rd (the day after the president's speech) and again on Thursday night. But every one of them had heard the president on Saturday morning, the 27th, repeatedly describe the proposal (actually, his own, though his hearers didn't know that) as "reasonable" and "fair." They knew

he had shown every inclination toward accepting it immediately, from which he had to be dissuaded by Bundy and others.

(It was twenty-five more years before Rusk revealed that Kennedy had prepared that night, at Rusk's suggestion, to have U Thant, Secretary-General of the UN, make the proposal in his name, which Kennedy would "accept." That had been a secret from McNamara and Bundy, all those years; perhaps even from RFK.

Secrets can be well kept, for a long time. Even by a score of men, several of whom write memoirs. Is it really conceivable that a program like Mongoose, the largest CIA undertaking until that time, involving thousands of people, could be kept unknown from Cabinet members like Dillon not only during the crisis but from nearly everyone outside the project for a dozen years?

Oh, yes.

I learned something startling about the secrecy system myself when the Church Committee reported. I learned in 1975 that that project, under RFK for the president, had been directed by my former boss in Vietnam in 1965-67, Ed Lansdale.

I had spent countless evenings in Lansdale's living-room in Saigon, listening to tales of his exploits as a covert operator for the CIA in the Philippines and in his earlier days in Vietnam, and a few about his clashes with McNamara in the Pentagon (over Vietnam). In those hundreds of hours of talk, fueled by a good deal of liquor, *I never once heard the word "Cuba" pass his lips*. Or, for that matter, the name Bobby Kennedy (unless once or twice, in passing), though he often spoke, sympathetically, about his brother. Yet just three years before I joined his team, Bobby had been his boss while he ran the largest operation in the history of the CIA, with the object of overthrowing Castro's regime in Cuba. He knew that I had been involved in the Cuban Missile Crisis, and had spent nearly a year studying it on a classified basis. Not a word from him that he had had Mongoose operatives in Cuba during the crisis, or that Bobby had chewed him out on the afternoon of the first ExComm session for not having accomplished enough "boom and bang" on the island.

Well, I had no "need to know." But that would seem to have been just as true of nearly everything else he used to relate to me. Perhaps the sensitivity of this particular information was related to the fact that the world had been brought to the edge of extinction by our president's own covert actions—and more specifically, my boss's own covert actions.

What was a revelation to me in 1975 was this. I thought I had known an unusual amount about how the secrecy system worked. I had had a Top Secret clearance for a dozen years, but more significantly, I had had a dozen compartmented clearances higher than Top Secret. I knew how and when the rules were bent and broken and which ones weren't. I was no stranger to *extreme* discretion and I was capable of it

myself, or I wouldn't have been made privy to so many secrets. (All this despite the reputation I earned in 1971 for disclosing a lot of relatively low-level "top secrets").

But I would simply not—until I read the Church Report account of Mongoose-- have believed it *possible* that this particular man (who I revered, with all his limitations) could have withheld this piece of information continuously through so many drunken evenings of secret-telling. My eyes were opened to a discipline of secret-keeping that was new even to me. (And if "even" seems pretentious there, I could tell a lot of stories about what I did know already about that subject.

[What follows will go somewhere else, in a long disquisition on secrecy.]

OK, here's one. In 1969 I was asked to give a classified lecture to the Policy Planning Staff at State based on my studies of decision-making. I focused on the distorting effects of secrecy, especially the super-secret compartmented classifications, on the decision process. I called the talk "Lying in State." I gave a number of specific examples, including some from the Cuban Crisis, One of my themes was a point I had made to Henry Kissinger earlier in the year **[quote this at some point, from the Rolling Stone interview]**: how extreme secrecy prevented the clearance-holder from getting feedback on proposals or policies from specially-informed or simply prudent people who didn't happen to have the clearances, so that reckless or wacky secret programs could gain momentum without ever meeting informed or even common sense criticism. (I didn't mention that I had started copying the Pentagon Papers that same month because of my sense of that precise problem. The Papers were only Top Secret, not higher, but they were marked "Sensitive," which had a similar effect to compartmentation in restricting those who could read and learn from them.)

My talk elicited a lot of examples illustrating my theses from participants, none of whom had ever taken part in a discussion like this before. (You had to have had the clearances to know the problem, and most people who did have them were so proud of and reliant on them that they didn't see any problem or feel free to discuss it.) The comments about this talk were so favorable, throughout the government, that I was invited to give it again in the fall of 1970, this time to a lot of intelligence analysts. I sometimes wondered how some of them thought back to this event when the Pentagon Papers came out nine months later.

Another example, indicating why I was so struck by the Church Report. For my crisis study in 1964, which was to include the Cuban Crisis, I was given a special clearance denoted as "I," for its code-name Ideal. (Among people who had them, clearances were referred to by letters, the first letter of the code-name for the clearance: so that if you were overheard by someone not cleared referring to an I clearance—which shouldn't happen, but if it did—they still wouldn't know the name of the clearance, still less what it covered.

For the real secrecy of this compartmented system, the very existence of these clearances higher than Top Secret was a secret, and so was the existence or content of any particular clearance. If you were talking to someone who had a Top Secret clearance but might or might not have this particular (or any) higher, compartmented clearance, and you wanted to inform him (almost always a man, in those days: not now) of some piece of information covered by that clearance or discuss it with him, you couldn't just ask him: "Are you cleared for 'I'?" The rules did not allow you to say that, to someone of whose status you weren't sure, on pain of losing the clearance. Why not? I'll come to that in a moment: first, the drill. [see file on The Secrecy Process]

If he didn't have that clearance, that would alert him to the existence of one he didn't have, and didn't even know existed, one that you apparently thought was relevant to his concerns or your mutual tasks. He would begin to ask about it (and why he didn't have it, or whether he needed it, and how he could get it), thus alerting others to the same questions. And meanwhile he and some of these others, might make guesses as to what it might cover and what the substance of the information might be, guesses that might be wrong or might be shrewd. ("What is it that my boss, or someone, doesn't want me to know, or doesn't think I need to know—but this person does? How does that affect what I should be recommending, or investigating?") Secrecy, and the benefits of secrecy, would be compromised.

It was by breaches like that that—amounting to "leaks" *within* that I myself came to have special clearances (as they were called then: now, compartmented clearances, or "SCI": sensitive compartmented information). First, I was in the Pentagon cafeteria late at night, talking with a colonel I was consulting with on war plans, Ernie Cragg. I asked him what made the intelligence analysts so sure that the Soviets had almost no ICBMs (the new estimate, in September, 1961). He looked at me and asked, what he was supposed not to: "Are you cleared for T and K?" I said no. He clammed up.

So I asked someone. Someone I'd long heard had "special clearances." Whatever those were; something to do with intelligence. Ironically, even amazingly, the person who spilled the beans, who really broke the rules by telling me, was a close friend at RAND, Andy Marshall. Those who know Andy will find this hard to believe. Andy was brilliant and creative, but inarticulate—he usually hesitated before he spoke, and halting when he did speak—and absolutely marvelous at secret-keeping. His response to a question he wouldn't answer, because it was secret, was to look at the questioner expressionlessly and without blinking, with his thin lips shut. After a while he might say, "Mmmm." He was never embarrassed by remaining silent for long periods, as he usually was in meetings. What he had to say was one-to-one, or to two or three.

(When Andy transferred to the Pentagon, as head of an unusually secretive and sensitive outfit, the Officer of Net Assessment, successor to the Net Evaluations

Subcommittee (NESC) which did RAND-like evaluations, but with official data, of the probable outcome of a nuclear war between the US and the Soviet Union, he stayed in that position over thirty years, into his nineties, the longest-tenured official in the Pentagon. He was known by his protégés there as Yoda, after the elf-like wizard in Star Wars who he resembled facially and in his gnomic utterances.

He was said to be the guru of Donald Rumsfeld in his second tour as Secretary of Defense. When the New Yorker did a profile of Rumsfeld and the “Revolution in Military Affairs” that was attributed to Marshall, “Dreaming About Defense,” Andy was interviewed and was often present, but the interviewer wasn’t allowed to use his name; he had to refer to him as The Analyst. (**? What was the term? Nicholas Lehmann, 2001**)

So it’s funny to recall that it was Andy Marshall who revealed to me the content of the T and K clearances, and suggested that I should try to get them. (It’s mean of me to identify Andy as the source of what was in those circles a fairly serious security breach, but at this point in his career he can handle it).

“T,” for Talent, was the clearance for U-2 photography; the U-2 had been flying secretly over the Soviet Union since 1956, until it was shot down by an SA-2 SAM (surface-to-air missile) in 1960. “K” or “KH,” for Keyhole, allowed one access to the photographs from the Corona satellite photographs that had started becoming available in 1960.

When I was invited to be a member of the Partridge Committee (for General Earl Partridge, former head of NORAD) studying and recommending the survival of command and communications in nuclear war—I was to work on the survival or devolution of presidential command authority, as I had under Secretary Gates the previous year—I asked to have T and K, and I got them.

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